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ABSTRACT

The transitions of women into and out of part-time work were studied by examining the same women over time, using data from the Young Women's cohort of the National Longitudinal Surveys. Two groups of women were studied: those who were aged 29-33 in 1978 and those who were 29-33 in 1983. The labor force transitions of the two groups were compared over a 5-year period. Some of the findings of the study were as follows: (1) in 1978, 62.2 percent of the women in the sample age were in the labor force--62.5 percent of them worked full time, 31 percent worked part time, and 6 percent were unemployed; (2) by 1983, the labor force participation rate increased to 73 percent--59 percent worked full time, 35 percent part time, and 6 percent were unemployed; (3) about three-fourths of those who worked full-time in 1978 were full-time workers in 1983, and half of the part-timers in 1978 were full-time workers in 1983; (4) most of the women who moved out of part-time work during the 5-year period moved into full-time work; (5) of those who were not in the labor force in 1978, nearly half were in the labor force in 1983, most working part-time; (6) in 1988, labor force participation increased to 80 percent, with 69 percent working full-time and 28 percent part-time; (7) for both groups, labor market status remained fairly stable over 5 years, with three-quarters of the women remaining in full-time work; (8) women who were married and worked part-time in 1978 but were no longer married in in 1983 were more likely to work full-time in 1983; (9) women who were not married in 1978 and got married by 1983 were even more likely to work full-time in 1983; (10) among women who added a child between 1978 and 1983, more moved into full-time work (37 percent) than dropped out of the labor force (15 percent); and (11) women who had a child age 5 or under in the household in both 1978 and 1983 were the most likely to remain as part-time workers. The study concluded that transitions from part-time work are only very loosely tied to changes in the presence of a young child. (KC)

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Work and Family: Part-Time Employment Transitions Among Young Women

Data from the National Longitudinal Surveys

U.S. Department of Labor
Bureau of Labor Statistics

Report 824
May 1992

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This issue of *Work and Family* illustrates the considerable stability in the labor market status among young women after a 5-year period, despite business cycle differences across time periods. The relationship between changes in marital status and transitions from part-time work, however, is not very strong. In addition, part-time work transitions are only very loosely tied to changes in the presence of a young child.

Overview

This report takes a look at transitions of women into and out of part-time work by examining the same women over time, using data from the Young Women's cohort of the National Longitudinal Surveys (NLS). The NLS provide information on a sample of women who were between the ages of 14 and 24 in 1968 and have been interviewed regularly since then. Two groups of women are studied: 1) those who were age 29 to 33 in 1978, and 2) those who were 29 to 33 in 1983. The labor force transitions of the two groups are compared over a 5-year period.

Over the past 20 years, the labor force participation rate of women has increased dramatically. In 1970, 41.6 percent of women over age 16 participated in the labor force. By 1990, this rate increased to 57.5 percent. During this same period the growth of the service sector has expanded part-time employment because most part-time workers are employed in the services and retail trade industries.[1]

Part-time employment offers a variety of advantages and disadvantages to workers. Part-time work may provide the flexibility some workers desire to maintain family, personal, and employment responsibilities simultaneously. For persons who are entering or reentering the labor market after a prolonged absence, part-time employment may also serve to ease the transition into full-time employment. Part-time work, however, rarely provides the job security, promotion potential, or other nonmonetary benefits of full-time employment. As a result, part-time work is sometimes thought both to create and to limit opportunities.[2]

In 1988, an average of 13.3 million women worked part time, accounting for about two-thirds of all persons on such schedules. Women in the prime working ages, 25 to 54, were five times more likely than their male counterparts to work part time. These women accounted for nearly 40 percent of part-time employment. The substantial employment of women in part-time jobs makes any study of part-time work especially relevant to women.[3]

Labor market status transitions

In 1978, 62.2 percent of the women in the sample age 29-33 were in the labor force. Of these, 62.5 percent worked full time; 31.2 percent worked part time; and 6.3 percent were unemployed. By 1983, the labor force participation rate increased to 73.4 percent, with 59.3 percent working full time, 35.2 percent part time, and 5.5 percent unemployed. While the proportion of women working rose substantially from 1978-83, the percentage of part-time workers grew relative to full-time workers.

Table 1 provides a transition matrix of labor force status between the years 1978 and 1983 for women who were age 29-33 in 1979. About three-fourths (75.9 percent) of those who worked full time in 1978 were full-time workers in 1983, and half of the part-timers in 1978 were employed part-time in 1983. Most of the women who moved out of part-time work during the 5-year period moved into full-time work (30.9 percent). Of those who were not in the labor force in 1978, nearly half (48.3 percent) were in the labor force in 1983, and most of these women were working part time in 1983.

[1] For a detailed analysis of part-time employment patterns, see Thomas J. Nardone, "Part-time workers: Who are they?" *Monthly Labor Review*, February 1986, pp. 13-19.

[2] For an examination of the advantages and disadvantages of part-time work, see Audrey VandenHuevel, "Juggling employment and family demands: Is part-time employment a solution for young mothers?" unpublished paper, Division of Demography and Sociology, Australian National University.

[3] Data on part-time employment are from the March 1988 Current Population Survey.

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Among women age 29-33 in 1983, 71.9 percent were in the labor force in that year. Of these, 66.0 percent worked full time; 26.3 percent worked part time; and 7.7 percent were unemployed. In 1988, labor force participation increased to 79.9 percent, with 68.9 percent working full time, 28.0 percent part time, and 3.1 percent unemployed. Over this time period the proportion of part-time workers relative to full-time workers remained fairly constant.

Table 2 shows a transition matrix for women who were age 29-33 in 1983. The patterns in table 2 are fairly similar to those in table 1. Over three-fourths (78.3 percent) of those who worked full time in 1983 were also full-time workers in 1988. Almost half (45.1 percent) of those who were employed part time in 1983 were part-time workers in 1988. Over the 1983-88 period, a larger percentage of women who were 29-33 years old (39.2 percent) moved out of part-time work into full-time work than between 1978 and 1983. Over half (56.4 percent) of the women who were out of the labor force in 1983 were in the labor force in 1988, and a higher proportion of these women moved into full-time work in 1988 than in 1983.

For both periods, 1979-83 and 1983-88, labor market status remained fairly stable after 5 years. In each case over three-quarters of the women remained in full-time work over the 5 years, and about half remained in part-time work. About half of those who were out of the labor force in the initial year moved into the labor force 5 years later, and most of these women moved into part-time work. There was an increased movement from part-time work into full-time employment from 1983-88, yet part of this change is probably due to business cycle differences over the two time periods.

Household events and transitions in part-time employment

Part-time employment may provide the flexibility for women to adapt to changes in their family roles and responsibilities. Marriage, divorce, and the presence of young children all may relate to significant changes in labor market behavior among women. In particular, transitions from part-time work into other labor market states may be associated with changes in a woman's marital status and childrearing status.

Changes in marital status. Table 3 provides information on 29- to 33-year-old part-time workers in 1978 and deals with the relationship between labor market transitions and changes in marital status. The data indicate that women who were married (spouse present) and worked part time in 1978, but were no longer married in 1983, were more likely to work full time in 1983. Surprisingly, those women who were not married in 1978 and got married by 1983 were even more likely to work full time in 1983. The percentage remaining as part-time workers is actually the same (34.7 percent) for both groups who had a change in marital status. Women who had the same marital status at the start and end of the 5-year period were the most likely to work part time in both periods.

Similar information for part-time workers who were 29-33 years old in 1983 appears in table 4. The data indicate that women who no longer had a spouse in 1988 were more likely to work full time in 1988. Women who married by 1988 were also more likely to become full-time workers. About half of part-time workers (49.3 percent) who had the same marital status in 1988 as in 1983 had continued to work part time.

The data in tables 3 and 4 suggest that the relationship between changes in marital status and transitions from part-time work is not very strong. Interestingly, in both time periods, a large percentage of women who married during the period moved into full-time work, as did women who no longer had a husband in the household. Women who had the same marital status were the most likely to remain working part time. One difference between the groups of women is that those who married over the 1983-88 period were more likely to drop out of the labor force than those who married between 1978 and 1983. Part of this difference may result from business cycle factors which led more wives to work in 1983.

Presence of young children. Data on the relationship between the presence of a young child in the household and transitions from part-time status for women who were age 29-33 in 1978 are shown in table 5. Although 15.2 percent of those who added a child age 5 or under by 1983 dropped out of the labor force, a larger percentage (37.0 percent) moved into full-time work by 1983. Similarly, about 40 percent who no longer had a child age 5 or under in the household in 1983 moved to full-time work by that year. Women who had a child age 5 or under in the household in both 1978 and 1983 were the most likely to remain as part-time workers; over 70 percent had that same labor market status.

Table 6 presents information on the relationship between the presence of a young child and part-time work transitions for the 1983-88 period. Here again, a large percentage (42.4 percent) of women who added a young child to the household by 1988 worked full time in 1988, which is approximately the same percentage as those who no longer had a child age 5 or under in the household in 1988. Women with a child age 5 or under in both 1983 and 1988 were the most likely to remain as part-time workers. These women, along with those who added a young child to the household by 1988, were the most likely to drop out of the labor force.

Overall, it appears that transitions from part-time work are only very loosely tied to changes in the presence of a young child. The percent of part-time workers who add a young child to the household and move into full-time employment is very similar to the percent of those who no longer have a child under age 5 and move into full-time work. Women who gained a child over the 1983-88 period

were more likely to drop out of the labor force than those who added a child over the 1978-83 period. Part of this difference may result from business cycle forces which led more women with young children to work in 1983 than in 1988.

Technical Notes

Data in this report are from the National Longitudinal Surveys (NLS), which are sponsored by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The Bureau contracts with the Center for Human Resource Research of The Ohio State University to manage the surveys and provide user services. The NLS were begun in the mid-1960's with the drawing of four samples: Young Men who were 14-24 years old in 1966, Young Women who were 14-24 years old in 1968, Older Men who were 45-59 years old in 1966, and Mature Women who were 30-44 years old in 1967. Each sample originally had about 5000 individuals with oversamples of blacks. In the early 1980's, the Young Men and Older Men surveys were discontinued. The women's surveys continue and are currently collected every 2 years.

In 1979, a new cohort was begun with a sample of over 12,000 young men and women who were 14-21 years of age in 1979. It included oversamples of blacks, Hispanics, economically disadvantaged whites, and youth in the military. The military oversample was discontinued after the 1984 survey and the economically disadvantaged white oversample was discontinued in 1990. This survey is called the Youth cohort, and it has been interviewed every year since it began.

The data in this report are weighted so that the sample is representative of the age group studied. In the transition tables, the samples include those individuals who were respondents in the endpoint years, and the endpoint year weights are used. The initial period distributions of labor market states among endpoint year nonrespondents are not significantly different from the samples included in the transition tables. All inferences that are discussed in the text are statistically significant at the 95-percent confidence level. Due to sampling variability, small differences between estimates that are not discussed in the text should be interpreted with caution. For a detailed explanation of the NLS, see *NLS Handbook 1991* (Center for Human Resource Research, Ohio State University). For information about the NLS, or to be placed on a mailing list, write to National Longitudinal Surveys, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Office of Research and Evaluation, Room 2126, Washington, DC 20212, or call (202) 523-1347.

Information in this report will be made available to sensory impaired individuals upon request. Voice phone: (202) 523-1221; TDD phone: (202) 523-3926; TDD Message Referral phone: 1-800-326-2577.

Brief definitions

Full-time workers are those who usually work 35 hours or more per week.

Part-time workers are those who usually work 1 to 34 hours per week.

Unemployed persons are those who had no employment during the survey week, were available for work at that time, and made specific efforts to find employment sometime during the prior 4 weeks. Persons laid off from their former jobs and awaiting recall and those expecting to report to a job within 30 days need not be looking for work to be classified as unemployed.

Persons out of the labor force are those individuals not classified as employed or unemployed.

Table 1. Labor market status transitions for women age 29-33 in 1978
(percent distribution)

Labor market status in 1978	Labor market status in 1983				
	Total	Full time	Part time	Unemployed	Out of the labor force
Full time	100.0	75.9	13.6	3.6	6.9
Part time	100.0	30.9	50.0	2.7	16.4
Unemployed	100.0	46.6	22.0	8.4	23.0
Out of the labor force	100.0	17.3	26.1	4.9	51.7

Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Young Women

Table 2. Labor market status transitions for women age 29-33 in 1983
(percent distribution)

Labor market status in 1983	Labor market status in 1988				
	Total	Full time	Part time	Unemployed	Out of the labor force
Full time	100.0	78.3	11.9	1.6	8.2
Part time	100.0	39.2	45.1	1.7	14.0
Unemployed	100.0	68.7	14.0	5.6	11.7
Out of the labor force	100.0	24.7	28.8	2.9	43.6

Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Young Women

Table 3. Changes in marital status and transitions from part-time work among women age 29-33 who worked part time in 1978

(percent distribution)

Change in marital status between 1978 and 1983 for part-time workers	Labor market status in 1983				
	Total	Full-time	Part-time	Unemployed	Out of the labor force
Spouse present in 1978; no spouse present in 1983	100.0	40.1	34.7	6	5.2
No spouse present in 1978; spouse present in 1983	100.0	46.3	34.7	0	0
Same marital status in 1978 and 1983	100.0	37.8	51.6	2.9	17.7

Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Young Women

Table 4. Changes in marital status and transitions from part-time work among women age 29-33 who worked part time in 1983

(percent distribution)

Change in marital status between 1983 and 1988 for part-time workers	Labor market status in 1988				
	Total	Full-time	Part-time	Unemployed	Out of the labor force
Spouse present in 1983; no spouse present in 1988	100.0	47.7	25.8	1.1	9.4
No spouse present in 1983; spouse present in 1988	100.0	44.1	29.1	0	21.6
Same marital status in 1983 and 1988	100.0	39.1	43.3	1.3	11.7

Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Young Women

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Table 5. Changes in child composition of households and transitions from part-time work among women age 29-33 who worked part time in 1978

Change in young child composition of household between 1978 and 1983		Labor market status in 1983 (percent distribution)				
Child age 5 or under in household in 1978	Child age 5 or under in household in 1983	Total	Full time	Part time	Unemployed	Out of the labor force
No	Yes	100.0	37.0	31.3	15.2	16.5
Yes	No	100.0	40.5	46.0	3.3	10.2
Yes	Yes	100.0	18.9	71.0	0	10.1
No	No	100.0	28.8	47.2	2.4	21.6

Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Young Women

Table 6. Changes in child composition of households and transitions from part-time work among women age 29-33 who worked part time in 1983

Change in young child composition of household between 1983 and 1988		Labor market status in 1988 (percent distribution)				
Child age 5 or under in household in 1983	Child age 5 or under in household in 1988	Total	Full time	Part time	Unemployed	Out of the labor force
No	Yes	100.0	42.4	30.6	0	27.0
Yes	No	100.0	39.6	45.8	3.6	11.0
Yes	Yes	100.0	10.1	55.4	0	34.5
No	No	100.0	44.9	44.7	1.1	9.3

Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Young Women

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